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The Palimpsest

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

THE PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

THE MEANING OF PALIMPSEST

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY RUTH A. GALLAHER

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Namer of Towns

When the National Convention of the new Republican Party assembled in the "Republican Wigwam" in Chicago on May 16, 1860, almost five hundred delegates answered roll call and more than ten thousand spectators watched the proceedings. There were no electric lights and the vast hall was lighted by gas. The nomination of candidates for President and Vice President and the drafting of a platform attracted nation-wide attention but business promoters were not idle. Delegates and "their ladies" received invitations for post-convention excursion trips on the railroads running west into Iowa and on at least one steamboat line on the Mississippi. The excursion was to start on Monday, May twenty-first.

One of the New Jersey delegates-at-large who accepted the offer of a free trip into Iowa was John Insley Blair, a 58-year-old businessman from Blairstown, New Jersey. Whether Blair voted for Lincoln is not recorded but his experiences on this

trip are described in a small notebook in cramped handwriting, with many misspelled words. The journey was to have important results for the development of Iowa, but before we follow John I. Blair and his wife on this excursion trip, let us look at the experiences which made him what he was in 1860.

The founders of the Blair family had come to America about 1740. John's parents, James and Rachel (Insley) Blair, were of Scotch ancestry and at the time of his birth on August 22, 1802, they were living on the banks of the Delaware River, two miles below Belvidere, New Jersey.

For a few years young John Blair went to school three or four months each winter, but when he was ten years of age he declared: "I have seven brothers and three sisters. That's enough in the family to be educated. I am going to get rich." And so, at the age of eleven, he went to work in a country store at Hope, New Jersey, belonging to his cousin, Judge Blair. At eighteen he owned a store at Gravel Hill, New Jersey, later renamed Blairstown in his honor, and nine years later he had a chain of five general stores in the northern part of New Jersey and ran four "flouring-mills".

From storekeeping he turned to mining and from mining to railroad-building. Success in a mining enterprise begun in 1833 at Oxford Fur-

nace, New Jersey, led in 1846 to his participation in the founding of the Lackawanna Coal and Iron Company. Always reaching out into new fields, he investigated the possibility of making iron more cheaply by using anthracite coal. This venture was successful and led him to build and operate railroads in order to distribute the iron and coal products. Blair was one of the first directors of the Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western Railroad and in a short time was the largest stockholder. Soon he realized that steel rails were superior to those made of iron and, with his son, DeWitt Clinton Blair, and Oakes Ames, as partners, he established the Lackawanna Steel Company, thereby avoiding the cost of importing steel rails from England.

In the meantime, John I. Blair had married Ann Locke on September 20, 1828. The couple had four children, two sons — DeWitt Clinton and Marcus L. — and two daughters — Emma Elizabeth, who married Charles Scribner, the publisher, and Aurelia Ann, who became the wife of Clarence G. Mitchell.

At the time John I. Blair came to Chicago to attend the Republican convention he was already a wealthy businessman and his past fitted naturally into his future career in Iowa. In his journal of the excursion (now in the possession of the

State Department of History and Archives at Des Moines) Blair reveals his inadequate education and his almost penurious attitude toward petty expenses, but it also shows his alert mind, his capacity for acquiring data, and his interest in possible business openings.

The three hundred delegates who accepted the excursion invitation took the "cars" for Dubuque, going by way of Rockford and Galena on the Galena and Union Railroad. It was Blair's first trip to Iowa and the country was new to many of the other sightseers. The men exchanged ideas on business as well as politics and together with their wives enjoyed the free tour. Early Tuesday morning after gala welcomes and celebrations at Galena and Dubuque they boarded a steamboat which took them down to Clinton where their arrival was the occasion for a military reception with much firing of guns. Tuesday night they arrived by rail in Cedar Rapids on the "Chicago, Fulton and Nebraska Rail Road" and after speeches and merry-making which lasted until midnight, they left early Wednesday morning for Clinton to return to Chicago by the "Fulton & Chicago Rail Road", arriving there at five o'clock P. M.

It is evident that Blair pondered in his mind the situation and opportunities in Iowa and he observed the railroad situation with a keen eye, for

in his journal of the 1860 excursion he wrote: "I Consider this Road [Chicago, Fulton and Nebraska] Considering its extension with the land grant on the 200 Miles West of Cedar Rappids, one of the Most desirable and if Rightly Managed ought to pay."

By 1862 60-year-old John I. Blair was ready to take a hand in building railroads in Iowa and the Midwest. Apparently his first venture in this State was in the organization of the Cedar Rapids and Missouri River Railroad and the construction of the road westward from Marshalltown. In June, 1863, Blair, accompanied by his son, D. C. Blair, his brother, James Blair, Oakes Ames, W. W. Walker, and several employees, including a cook, made a trip across Iowa from Marshalltown to the Missouri River at Onawa and on into Nebraska, returning by way of Council Bluffs and Des Moines. Blair left a record of this trip also. Their transportation was furnished by three wagons with teams and drivers. Apparently they secured provisions along the way for Blair records in his account of the journey that one day they bought three chickens and adds "the Shepard Dog Catched the Chickens in Handsome Stile". The entire trip, about 3,200 miles, he estimated cost four hundred dollars.

At that time four railroads were racing across

Iowa to connect with the Union Pacific Railroad then under construction. John Blair won the race for his line, later the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad, for this road ran the first train into Council Bluffs on January 22, 1867.

The victory was only the beginning of Blair's railroad interests in Iowa. He helped to organize the Sioux City and Pacific Railroad Company in August, 1864, and was its first president. He organized the Iowa Falls and Sioux City Railroad Company in October, 1867. Altogether he is said to have built a total of 803 miles of railroads in Iowa and eventually he controlled 1,035 miles of railroads in Iowa and Nebraska, owning about one-sixth of the stock of the sixteen different companies with which he was associated. The *Bellevue Leader* of May 31, 1923, said "Blair was a human dynamo let loose in railway-mad Iowa".

As in his early life, one business venture led to another. All railroad companies crossing Iowa at this time were given large grants of land and John I. Blair helped organize the Iowa Rail Road Land Company in 1869 and served as its first president. In June, 1871, he organized the Blair Town Lot and Land Company and took over the unsold town lots and lands along the line of the Cedar Rapids and Missouri River Railroad. The two companies consolidated in 1888.

When Congress, in 1882, granted to the Sioux City and Pacific Railroad Company the right to erect a bridge across the Missouri River at a point between Missouri Valley, Iowa, and Blair, Nebraska, Blair helped organize the Missouri Valley and Blair Railway and Bridge Company to do the work. The bridge was open for traffic in November, 1883.

For a number of years Blair's headquarters were at Cedar Rapids and to house them he constructed the Blair Building, at that time "the most pretentious structure in the city", at a cost of some $60,000. The building was financed jointly by the Cedar Rapids and Missouri Railroad Company, the Iowa Rail Road Land Company, the Iowa Falls and Sioux City Railroad Company, the Sioux City and Pacific Railroad Company, and the First National Bank of Cedar Rapids (which he had helped organize in 1864), indicating the variety of Blair's business connections. He also owned land in his own right, amounting, it is said, to half the area of his native State of New Jersey.

Railroads meant new towns and John I. Blair is said to have laid out more than eighty townsites. For example, most of the towns between Iowa Falls and Sioux City owe their beginning to Blair's enterprise. Each site, of course, had to have a name. Blair was equal to the occasion.

Knowing little of the ancient classical world or of literature, he used his family, friends, and business associates as a reservoir of names. A dog furnished one name. Just how many towns Blair named and how many of these names were connected with his family and associates it is difficult to say, but it appears that more than twenty Iowa towns owe their names to John I. Blair. Others were named by the Iowa Rail Road Land Company of which Blair was the guiding spirit.

Two Iowa towns derived their name from Blair himself — Blairsburg in Hamilton County and Blairstown in Benton County were platted and named by Blair. Aurelia, Iowa, was named in honor of his younger daughter, Aurelia Ann. According to local reminiscences, Alta, in Buena Vista County, was named for another "beautiful" daughter, but it appears that Blair had no daughter by that name. No Iowa town seems to have been named for Emma Elizabeth, although the name Belle Plaine in Benton County is said to have been given in honor of Isabelle Scribner, Emma's daughter. Blair named Marcus in Cherokee County for his son, Marcus L., who died unmarried in 1873. DeWitt, Iowa, was founded before Blair came to Iowa but it is probable that the town of DeWitt and DeWitt Clinton Blair were named for DeWitt Clinton of New York.

In these honors his wife, Ann, seems not to have shared although she often accompanied him on business trips and in 1870 she helped him plat the Blair addition to New Cherokee in Cherokee County, now the city of Cherokee. The platting of this addition was part of a complicated rivalry for a townsite and the railroad. A man named William Van Eps platted a townsite just east of the New Cherokee site and, hoping to attract the railroad to his town, named it Blair City. But having towns named for him was commonplace and Blair apparently preferred to sell some of his own land, so the railroad made a curve, passed by Blair City, and went through Blair's addition to New Cherokee.

Ames was named in honor of Oakes Ames of Massachusetts in appreciation for his aid in the building of railroads in the West. Blair owned much of the land where Boone is now located and the town is said to have been named by him. Otter Creek Station, now Chelsea, in Tama County, was platted and probably named by Blair. He named Colo in Story County from a child's pronunciation of Carlo, the name of a favorite dog belonging to the owner of the land on which the station was located.

L. Cushing Kimball of Boston, Massachusetts, was remembered by Blair when he founded Cush-

ing, Iowa. Vail, located in Crawford County, was named for C. E. Vail, a nephew, and Hazzard, later Meriden, derived its title from another of Blair's relatives. Whiting in Monona County was named for Judge Charles E. Whiting, a farmer who lived nearby. Walker in Linn County was named for W. W. Walker, a business associate. Blair's original name for Fonda was Marvin, named for Marvin Hewett, superintendent of the Illinois Central Railroad at that time. He named Ogden for William B. Ogden, an associate in railroad building, and Remsen in Plymouth County was given the middle name of Dr. William Remsen Smith, pioneer physician in Sioux City, who owned a large amount of land in that vicinity. Scranton in Greene County was probably named for George W. and Selden T. Scranton, early business associates of Blair in New Jersey.

When the Sioux City railroad — now part of the Illinois Central — was completed to the point where LeMars is now located, Blair arranged an excursion party which included a number of ladies. On arrival at the westernmost point he offered to let the ladies name the new town. When they could not agree on a name, one lady suggested a name be formed from the initial of each woman's Christian name. "Selmar" or "LeMars" were pos-

sibilities. The majority voted in favor of LeMars so Blair adopted the name.

John Insley Blair represented big business in his day. He attracted money and economic power as a magnet attracts steel filings. How much money he had is not definitely known, but in the first years of the Civil War he is said to have loaned the United States government a million dollars to take care of the rapidly increasing expenditures. Yet he was a man of simple habits. It is said that he kept his accounts himself, using an envelope filing system which was superior to the bookkeeping systems of that period.

Tall, and well built, just under six feet, Blair was a man of unusual energy and remarkable physique. It is reported that in going upstairs he always "took two steps at a time". During his active years he was accustomed to travel as much as 40,000 miles a year, but at eighty-five he reduced this to 20,000. When he was ninety-two he was often at his desk by 5:30 A. M. In spite of his boyhood hardships and his strenuous life, Blair lived to be past ninety-seven.

Blair's attire usually included a Prince Albert coat, a white waistcoat, and a high beaver hat in which he often carried his papers. Although he was described as genial and a good story-teller, Scotch thrift and boyhood hardships made him

close, even stingy. One of the many stories told about him illustrates his miserly attention to small sums. He once ate a meal in a small eating house on the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad. The restaurant owner told him the charge was fifty cents. Blair threw down a quarter instead. After some argument the restaurant keeper admitted that the usual charge for railroad men was a quarter but that others were charged fifty cents. "I am a railroad man", snapped Blair, "I own this road", and stalked out.

But Blair had a generous side and gave away many thousands of dollars to educational institutions and churches. He was a lifelong member of the Presbyterian Church and, by gifts of land and money, helped to establish more than one hundred churches in the towns along his railroads. When a tornado demolished the buildings at Iowa College (now Grinnell) in 1888, Blair contributed $50,000 to help with the restoration. He also made a donation to Coe College at Cedar Rapids and to Park College at Parkville, Missouri. During his lifetime he is said to have given away some $5,000,000.

Always abstemious himself, Blair conformed to local Iowa sentiment favoring prohibition and he inserted in the deeds, restrictions against the sale or manufacture of liquor on the lands he sold. He

early adopted the plan of having trees planted along his western railroads. These served as windbreaks and as protection against snowdrifts. Later, as Blair had foreseen, they furnished new ties for the railroad.

Although John Blair's operations in the west extended in succeeding years from Iowa to Wisconsin, Kansas, Nebraska, Dakota, Missouri, and Texas he always returned to his home town — Blairstown, New Jersey. He was postmaster there for 40 years and for several years had the distinction of being the oldest bank president in the country. It was at Blairstown that he died on December 2, 1899, and, fittingly enough, he was buried in Blairstown cemetery. The man whose boyhood ambition had been to "get rich" had fulfilled his dream; John I. Blair's estate was valued at about $70,000,000. Thus ended the life of "John Insley Blair, eccentric millionaire, storekeeper, postmaster, miller, banker, iron manufacturer, railway promoter, and namer of towns".

MARY CULBERTSON LUDWIG

Lest We Forget

Few Iowans can, perhaps, recall offhandedly the name of Ralph Neppel of Glidden, the Iowa farm lad who won the Congressional Medal of Honor in World War II by stopping a German tank after both his legs had been blown off by its fire. Some have forgotten that Merle Hay from the same community had been one of the first three Americans to die in active and violent combat in World War I. A quiz master might stump us on the name of the commander of the *Iowa* at Santiago, Cuba, in 1898, but the record of Robley D. Evans and the gallant ship he commanded is written large in the annals of the American Navy.

Few of those who read these pages are aware, perhaps, that Joseph Evans Griffith, a member of the Twenty-second Iowa Infantry, was one of the two men who penetrated the Confederate lines in actual assault at Vicksburg and came back alive with prisoners and an enemy flag. And, speaking of flags, it was another Iowan, who, over one hundred years ago, placed the victorious banner of the invading Americans over the City of Mexico.

Since every reader may not recall the latter person by name, may we present Captain Benja-

min Stone Roberts, a former practicing attorney-at-law in Fort Madison. Born in Vermont in 1811, Roberts came to Iowa after his graduation in the class of 1835 from West Point, to become adjutant at old Fort Des Moines near the mouth of the Des Moines River. After his resignation from military service he went east to become a railroad engineer and assistant State geologist of New York.

Returning to Iowa to practice law after turning down an opportunity to build railroads in Russia, Roberts became an officer in the Territorial militia, then joined a mounted rifle regiment on the outbreak of hostilities with Mexico. At the storming of Chapultepec he distinguished himself by leading the advance company and the following day led the advance into the City of Mexico. In recognition of his dashing courage, he was given the honor of raising the United States flag over the Capitol.

Nor did his home State fail to note the dashing, reckless daring of the Iowan. In 1850, by vote of the General Assembly, Captain Roberts was officially presented with a beautifully engraved and inscribed sword. A suit of Mexican armor presented by Captain Roberts to the State of Iowa is now preserved by the State Historical Society at Iowa City.

All in all, some one thousand and twenty-three Iowa soldiers participated in this first American Expeditionary Force which took part in that epic struggle one hundred years ago. Of this number ninety-eight were killed and one hundred and nineteen were wounded. Thirty-eight Iowans advanced to ranks above lieutenant.

That the memories and incidents of the service of these men in the Mexican War might not be forgotten, early Iowa map-makers drew generously on the names of places and personages of that war. Three counties, Buena Vista, Cerro Gordo, and Palo Alto, were named for famous battlefields while eleven others — Butler, Clay, Fremont, Guthrie, Hardin, Mills, Page, Ringgold, Scott, Taylor, and Worth — bear the names of popular State and national heroes. Yell County, later merged to form Webster County, was named for Colonel Archibald Yell, killed leading a charge at Buena Vista. Risley County, later blotted out, was said to have been named for a Colonel Risley also killed in the Mexican War. He seems to have been the "forgotten man", for no definite data on him has been found.

Fremont, Scott, and Taylor counties wear the names of the three most famous generals of that time — John C. Fremont, Winfield Scott, and Zachary Taylor. Other generals of the period so

remembered were William O. Butler and William J. Worth. Clay County proudly honors the name of Henry Clay, Jr., son and namesake of Henry Clay of Kentucky, killed at Buena Vista.

Colonel John J. Hardin, a nephew of Henry Clay and a battle casualty from the sister State of Illinois, was another national figure recognized and remembered in the name of Hardin County. Page County bears the name of Captain John Page and Ringgold that of Major Samuel Ringgold, both mortally wounded in the fighting at Palo Alto. Mills and Guthrie counties obtained their nomenclature from two men more closely identified with Iowa's participation than are any of the others. Both were named for men who were Iowa residents at the time of their enlistment, served in an Iowa military organization, and gave their lives in heroic fashion. The service record of each was short but fully packed with daring and action.

Six months before his death, Frederick D. Mills was a practicing attorney at Burlington. Massachusetts-born and a graduate of Yale, he had arrived in Iowa in 1841. Five years later, President Polk commissioned him as a major in the 15th United States Infantry, six companies of which were to be recruited in Ohio, two in Michigan, and one each in Iowa and Wisconsin. In the chapel

of the Military Academy at West Point, a tablet bears his name as one of the outstanding heroes of the Mexican War. He met death riding ahead of his men in a wild charge at Churubusco. His horse, a spirited animal, jumped the enemy trenches and ran directly into the midst of the Mexican forces, bearing Major Mills, sword in hand, to a soldier's death.

The Mexican War was the first opportunity for Iowa militia to be called into federal service. On May 13, 1846, President James K. Polk called for fifty thousand volunteers, asking the Territory of Iowa for one regiment of ten companies, each company to consist of one captain, two lieutenants, four sergeants, four corporals, two musicians, and sixty-four privates. The message was sent to Governor James Clarke who responded with a prompt appeal for Iowa enlistments. The thinly-spread citizenry answered enthusiastically. By June 26, 1846, the Iowa quota was filled and overflowing with fourteen, not ten, volunteer companies. Two companies each were offered by Lee, Des Moines, and Van Buren counties, one each from Louisa, Muscatine, Washington, Dubuque, Jefferson, Henry, and Jackson, with Johnson and Linn combining to form another.

John Chambers, then ex-Governor, who had served throughout the War of 1812 on the staff of

William Henry Harrison, was offered the appointment as commander but failing health and his advanced age necessitated his declining the proffered honor. Fortunately, the services of the entire regiment were not needed; only four companies were ever actually mustered into service and only Company K actually participated in the war in Mexico.

Company K was attached to the 15th United States Infantry in which Frederick D. Mills served as major. Edwin Guthrie of Fort Madison was named captain of Company K. A native of New York, Guthrie had moved to Iowa in 1836. He was warden of the State Penitentiary at the outbreak of the war and as a prominent Whig had frequently been mentioned as suitable to represent his county in the legislature. Captain Guthrie led his men until mortally wounded on June 20, 1847, in a skirmish at La Hoya Pass on the road between Vera Cruz and Perote. He died exactly one month later at the last named place, aged forty-one.

Company K was actively engaged from the time it landed at Vera Cruz until the end of the war. A long series of brilliant and bold achievements established for it a high standard of excellence that has proven a worthy example of inspiration for all the Iowa organizations which have followed

it in our succeeding wars. Forty per cent of its original one hundred and thirteen members were lost in action, including its major and captain.

One other military unit belongs in the annals of Iowa for this era. In 1846 Mormons in large numbers were crossing Iowa enroute to their newly founded community in Utah. At the suggestion of the Secretary of War, Captain James Allen of the First United States Dragoons was detailed to enlist a battalion of five companies of one hundred men each to join an expeditionary force for California. Captain Allen met little trouble in enlisting the five hundred Mormons at Kanesville, now Council Bluffs. This battalion participated in one of the most remarkable marches ever undertaken — from Fort Leavenworth to Santa Fe and thence to Los Angeles, only to find no fighting to do since the Pacific Coast had already been taken by the Americans.

While fighting was going on in the south and southwest, minor clouds appeared in northeast Iowa and in Minnesota. Unrest among the Indian tribes in the vicinity of Fort Atkinson, claimed by some to have been fomented by Mexican interests, required the active service of three of the four Iowa units accepted for service. Among these were Captain James M. Morgan's Independent Company of Iowa Infantry Volunteers, mustered

into service on July 15, 1846, for one year's service, Captain John Parker's Company of Iowa Dragoons Volunteers which served from September 9 to November 4, 1846, and Captain Morgan's Company of Iowa Mounted Volunteers, mustered into service on July 15, 1847. The Mounted Volunteers escorted the unruly Winnebagoes to their new home in Minnesota in 1848. This proved an exciting and dangerous mission: the little band of courageous horsemen moved nearly three thousand braves, squaws, and Indian children in a cavalcade of one hundred sixty-six supply wagons, nearly sixteen hundred ponies, and one hundred and forty cattle for a journey of three hundred and ten miles through hostile country.

One hundred years and more have passed since these early Hawkeyes sprang to answer their country's call for armed force with the offering of their lives. Their generous response revealed a willingness that Iowans, since that early date, have ever shown whenever America has wanted or needed fighting men. In each of our succeeding wars Iowa regiments and individual soldiers have been conspicuous for their gallantry and daring and for a courage and tenacity second to none. "May the wreaths they have won never wither, nor the stars of their glory grow dim."

RAY MURRAY

Warden and Warrior

Come from the mountain and the valley,
From prairie-lawn and woodland sally,
For Texas and for freedom rally,
Rise! rise! rise! Freemen rise!

Thus did the Bloomington (Muscatine) *Herald* of June 12, 1846, announce the call to arms for the Mexican War. Eleven days earlier Governor James Clarke had received a requisition from President James K. Polk for a regiment of ten companies from the Territory of Iowa. Among the companies was one enrolled in the vicinity of Burlington, Keosauqua, Bloomington, and Fort Madison. Recruiting was informal. Among the most dynamic and enthusiastic of the leaders was Edwin Guthrie, erstwhile justice of the peace and lately warden of the Penitentiary. In recognition of his ability as a leader and his interest in the raising of the company, Edwin Guthrie was named captain and on April 9, 1847, this company was attached to the 15th U. S. Infantry, a regiment recruited from the States of Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Iowa. This was the only Iowa company to see service in Mexico and the first unit from this State to take part in a campaign abroad.

Not too much is known about Captain Guthrie's career before he came to Iowa. According to the *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers,* Vol. VI, he was born in Smyrna, New York, on December 11, 1806. There he later married Adeline Jewett on September 7, 1827. For some time he lived at Sackett's Harbor, New York, where he was a manufacturer of chemicals and a distiller. In 1835 or 1836 he moved to Iowa where he settled at Fort Madison on the Mississippi River.

His abilities were evidently soon recognized in this small pioneer community, for he served as justice of the peace, holding commissions first from Governor Stevens T. Mason of Michigan Territory, then from Governor Henry Dodge of Wisconsin Territory, and finally from Governor Robert Lucas of the Territory of Iowa. The date of his first appointment is not certain, but it must have been some time in 1836, just before Iowa became part of Wisconsin Territory. He is not listed with the settlers coming to Fort Madison in 1835, but his name, spelled *Guthery,* appears on the 1836 census roll.

Guthrie's record as a justice of the peace won both approval and sharp criticism from his neighbors. On October 4, 1837, a letter was sent to Governor Dodge signed by Peter Perkins and forty-seven others, complaining that Guthrie was

remiss in his duties, partial in his decisions, and not of sufficient capacity to fill the office. Incidentally, the signers recommended another candidate, Isaac Vandyke, for the office when Guthrie's term expired. However, this first letter was followed by another on October 30, 1837, signed by James Douglass (the first postmaster at Fort Madison) and sixty-five others. The second letter described Guthrie as "prompt and efficient" in the performance of his duties, "governed in his decisions by the strictest impartiality", and characterized by ability, integrity, and high moral worth. This letter concluded by recommending his reappointment. Apparently the larger number of signatures convinced Governor Dodge, for he reappointed Guthrie on November 13, 1837. On January 19, 1838, Governor Dodge further added to Guthrie's duties by appointing him as commissioner of bail for Lee County.

Hawkins Taylor, another pioneer from the same area, wrote an interesting sketch of Guthrie's character for the *History of Lee County, Iowa* (1879). He described Guthrie as a man who drank no liquor, never gambled, and was always polite and full of moral courage. No man, because he was poor or insignificant, ever failed to get justice from Squire Guthrie who "hated slavery and loved justice and freedom". Taylor

claimed he did not know Guthrie's religious sentiments, but he knew that he liked to fish and hunt and often used to slip off on Sundays with his fish pole and gun to the bottomlands below the town. This habit apparently offended the zealous churchmen who then combined with the whiskey-drinking, gambling crowd to oppose Guthrie's appointment whenever his commission was to be renewed, but moderates kept him in office.

After August 26, 1842, when he was appointed its second warden, Guthrie's story becomes associated with that of the Penitentiary at Fort Madison. Construction of the Penitentiary began in 1839 and in 1841 William Anderson became its first warden. After Anderson's death, Edwin Guthrie succeeded him and three months later made the official "Report of the Warden of the Iowa Penitentiary" to the Legislative Assembly for 1842-1843. His report shows a remarkable grasp of the details of running the institution, although he complains of the difficulties of getting provisions because his scrip issued in payment was below par on account of the tardiness of its redemption. His executive ability was recognized in 1843 when the Council augmented his duties as warden to include those of director and superintendent of construction and he then embarked on a new building program.

His report in 1845 contains his theories on the treatment of prisoners, theories which were advanced for his day. Solitary confinement, for example, was substituted for corporal punishment and he reported: "the violent methods have been almost or wholly abandoned, and the more rational or human one adopted of rewarding merit by marks of approbation". Added to this, he had set aside half of Saturday afternoon for washing up and reading. The books provided for the prisoners included the Bible, lives of self-made men and celebrated travelers, and the *Penny Magazine*. Guthrie admitted that not everyone responded to his lenient treatment, that some prisoners were "strangers to the emotion of gratitude" and could not be dealt with in this approved fashion. He reported thirteen convicts and only one guard who received only one-fourth of his $20 a month salary. But his chief complaint in the report was that his prison was not as self-supporting as he had hoped.

When Guthrie took over the office as warden, on August 24, 1842, he reported a deficit in Penitentiary accounts of $551.49. By December 1, 1842, the debt increased to $628.89. In December, 1843, Guthrie reports a debt on building alone of $1,387.22. By May, 1845, he reports a loss between December 1, 1843, and May 1, 1845,

of $688.49. From May to December, 1845, there was another $423.18 deficit. In apologizing for the continuing indebtedness he mentioned that there had been few convictions so that the earning power of his prisoners had been reduced. Sickness had further reduced the working days (304 days were lost thus). Also he reiterated the complaint about depreciation of his scrip, which was never sold without a loss of at least 30 cents to the dollar. His explanations of the debt were evidently not entirely satisfactory to the Legislative Assembly of 1845, which by joint resolution appointed a commission to examine the affairs of the Penitentiary.

The committee's report, published in the *Journal of the House of Representatives* for 1845-1846, was not a whitewash for Guthrie. While the investigators complimented the "gentlemanly" warden who was anxious to coöperate with their efforts, they were by no means satisfied with the Penitentiary accounts. They found that over $44,000 had been spent on buildings and yet one-third of the prisoners committed had escaped. In fact they found the buildings so inadequate for prison purposes that they reported "any prisoner of common cunning that could not get out of the prison ought to be whipped out." The second objection was that prisoners were put to work in the

town in competition with day laborers and thus required as many guards as there were prison workers. This practice the commission considered costly as well as unfair to the town.

Furthermore, the committee found the books of the prison in such a state that it was necessary to get most of the information about expenses of the institution from direct interviews with merchants, prison guards, and discharged prisoners. They found that a large item of expense was the prodigious amount of meat ordered for the prisoners, averaging three pounds per prisoner per day. Guthrie explained that some of the meat was spoiled and had to be thrown away, but the investigators felt that merchants should have been asked to give credit for all that was inedible. Also they found that prisoners had access to the provisions whenever they chose, a practice which probably helped explain the enormous consumption.

Another objection which the investigators raised was the warden's practice of charging a profit on all purchases for the Penitentiary. This he did on account of the depreciation of scrip, but the committee "could not understand the merits of his reasoning". Nor did they approve his practice of charging articles for his private use to the Penitentiary account. Finally, they concluded that if the present system was to be continued, the war-

den should be required to adopt a different mode of bookkeeping so that all items were carefully recorded. They made it clear that they did not wish to cast any reflection on the present warden, but that the natural suspicion which attaches to every public officer when he does not produce clear evidence of all his transactions, might thus be avoided.

The committee, while not in favor of leasing the Penitentiary, concluded that in light of the prison debt and the newness of the Territory, it would be better if the legislature leased the prison for a term of five to ten years. But they stipulated that the choice of the lessee was extremely important and that he should be required to confine his operations to a business which would compete least with the laborers and mechanics of the surrounding community. On January 17, 1846, the Legislative Assembly acted on this suggestion and voted to lease the Penitentiary to John W. Cohick, beginning March 15, 1846.

Guthrie's reputation for leniency to prisoners was apparently generally known, for J. M. Reid's *Sketches and Anecdotes of the Old Settlers* complains that the convicts of Fort Madison Penitentiary were not under one-half as strict a discipline as soldiers in the regular army. This account charges that prisoners slept in separate cells, were

well fed and clothed, were allowed freedom when they were sent out to work; in fact, they lived better at Fort Madison than they "had been in the habit of living at home before conviction". For this, Warden Edwin Guthrie alone could be held responsible.

This complaint about the leniency of his prison may throw some light on another of Guthrie's activities during this period. On October 16, 1845, he served as president at a mass meeting of Lee County citizens in the courthouse in Fort Madison. The purpose of the meeting was a protest against the recent crimes in this area, reputedly committed by Mormons. Resolutions were adopted that all Mormons should be ordered to leave Lee County and that two anti-Mormon candidates should be nominated for the next legislature. Later a long statement to "Voters and Taxpayers of Lee County" was published, listing criminals and giving the reasons for the Anti-Mormon ticket, as well as announcing the candidates — William Patterson and Jesse B. Browne — who had been selected at the meeting at which Guthrie presided. It is possible that his prominent rôle at this meeting was his attempt to answer the criticism against his too-lenient treatment of prisoners. Crime had clearly gotten out of hand in his community, and he was apparently quite willing

to join with law-abiding citizens to do something about it.

At the time Guthrie gave up his duties as warden, a new career was open to him. War fever had spread over the Territory and Governor James Clarke, on June 1, 1846, called for ten companies of volunteers to serve in the war with Mexico. Guthrie was commissioned captain in the U. S. Army on March 8, 1847, by President James K. Polk. On April 9, 1847, he was assigned to Company K of the 15th U. S. Infantry Regiment and its former captain, Frederick D. Mills, was promoted to major in the regiment. The rendezvous of Company K was at Fort Madison and without ever joining the rest of the regiment which had assembled at Newport Barracks, Kentucky, Guthrie and his company were sent by steamboat down the Mississippi to New Orleans and then by ocean steamer to Vera Cruz. Almost immediately, Company K was sent on the road to Puebla escorting a supply train to join General Scott's march on the capital city. But Guthrie never even got to join the rest of the regiment, for at a skirmish on the road to Perote, three weeks after he landed, he was wounded on June 20, 1847, at La Hoya Pass. The wound was serious, for an escopet ball had struck his thigh. He was taken to the castle of Perote where his leg was amputated, but when

another amputation became necessary, he died of hemorrhage on July 20, 1847, just a month after he was wounded.

Company K remained actively engaged throughout the war. Its losses from death and disease were heavy (40 per cent), but nearly every one of its officers received special mention at brevet promotions for "gallant and meritorious conduct". Of the total enrollment of 113, only 52 were left to be mustered out at Covington, Kentucky, on August 4, 1848.

While Captain Guthrie did not live to see his Company K distinguish itself in the fighting, he had the dubious honor of being the first Iowa officer to die in the Mexican War. His friends back in Iowa remembered him and the General Assembly in 1850 honored his memory by naming Guthrie County after this Mexican War hero.

JEAN B. KERN

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